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Elections Force Political Changes in Japan

The numbers tell the story. The ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) won fewer seats than many pessimists predicted in lower house elections held December 18, forcing changes in the Nakasone Cabinet and adjustments in the prime minister's strategy for retaining political power beyond the expiration of his term as LDP party president at the end of the year.

Although preliminary polls had indicated the possibility of holding on to 270 seats, the LDP won only 250 (of 511) seats in the election, with a low 68 percent of the voters casting ballots in the contest. Surveys taken a few days before the elections showed a decline in support for the pa[illegible], but still

suggested that the LDP would be able to retain its majority in the lower house. The Clean Government Party (Komeito) picked up 25 seats in the election, while other opposition parties gained less than ten seats each (refer to tables in this issue for additional election figures).

The loss of 36 seats forced the LDP to establish an alliance with the New Liberal Club, a splinter party established after the Lockheed scandal exposed corruption within the LDP. With only six members in the Diet, the party had little claim to Cabinet representation. However, its representatives -- originally members of the LDP -- were more favorably disposed to a coalition with the LDP than other opposition parties, particularly left-wing groups. For the purpose of retaining control in the Diet, a coalition with the NLC was certainly the least offensive alternative.

Several factors contributed to the poor LDP showing. The party had more candidates running in multi-member districts than in 1980 when public sympathy for the party bloated its representation in the Diet. By running so many candidates in a year in which losses were expected, the LDP diffused its vote and lost more seats than it might have otherwise. The relatively low voter turnout, a manifestation of public disgust with Kakuei Tanaka's refusal to resign from his parliament seat, also damaged the LDP's chances. It was this issue that focused attention on the election. Mr. Tanaka, who ironically won more votes in his re-election campaign than ever before, steadfastly refused to step down from public office after his conviction and was determined to retain his power in national politics. His own faction fared well in the elections, dropping only four seats.

The lack of a domestic economic policy and confusion over the prime minister's commitment to an income-tax cut also hurt Mr. Nakasone, who sought instead to emphasize his role as a global leader. Japanese voters, while perhaps appreciative of his efforts, nevertheless held him accountable for the absence of decisive economic policies at home. The reputable Nihon Keizai Shimbun editorially criticized the prime minister for concentrating on foreign policy at the expense of domestic economic issues, suggesting that he might have been able to fool foreign nations into thinking he was a powerful leader, but not Japanese voters. Defense issues played a quiet role in the elections and were not as critical as suggested by some American media accounts. The vote was not a repudiation of Japan's defense buildup, although the issue might have hindered the LDP among women voters.

With his new coalition in hand, Nakasone announced his new Cabinet on December 26, appointing members from all major factions (see list at the end of this report). But the Tanaka faction was still the most heavily represented, with six of its members in major posts. Nakasone faction members were assigned to three positions, of which the most intriguing was the relatively unknown Minister of International Trade and Industry, Hikosaburo Okonogi. Tanaka confidante Susumu Nikaido was replaced by Rokusuke Tanaka (no relation) in the important post of LDP Secretary General. Rokusuke Tanaka is said to have the trust of Prime Minister Nakasone as well as many of the LDP's rival leaders.

The appointments were announced shortly after the prime minister met with senior LDP leaders and subsequently promised to limit the influence of Kakuei Tanaka in party affairs. In a statement issued December 24, Mr. Nakasone lamented party losses in the elections, but refused to resign from his office. Promising to restore the tarnished image of the party, he emphasized that he would pay more attention to ethics in government. The statement reportedly was written by former LDP Secretary General Susumu Nikaido. That posibility raises the question of whether the former prime minister himself, aware of his victories at the expense of his own party, has moved to lower his public profile while protecting his power base in the LDP and that of the current prime minister. Another possibility is that Mr. Nikaido is moving independently or in cooperation with another faction leader to push Mr. Tanaka out of the spotlight and reduce his role in Japanese politics.

Michael Chinworth

Lower House Election Results

	Number of Candidates		Seats Won		Percent of Vote Won	
	1980	1983	1980	1983	1980	1983
Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)	310	337	284	250	47.9%	45.8%
Japan Socialist Party (JSP)	149	144	107	112	19.3	19.5
Clean Government Party (Komeito)	64	59	33	58	9.0	10.1
Democratic Socialist Party (DSP)	50	54	32	38	6.6	7.3
Japan Communist Party (JCP)	129	129	29	26	9.8	9.3
New Liberal Club (NLC)	25	17	12	8	3.0	2.3
Shaminren	5	4	3	3	0.7	0.7
Minor Parties	42	18	0	0	0.2	0.1
Independents	61	86	11	16	3.5	4.9
Total	835	848	511*	511	100	100

*The lower house had 13 vacancies between 1980 and 1983.

* * *

The Second Nakasone Cabinet

Name	Position	Age	Faction
Yasuhiro Nakasone	Prime Minister	65	Nakasone
Eisaku Sumi	Justice Minister	63	Suzuki
Shintaro Abe*	Foreign Minister	59	Fukuda
Noboru Takeshita*	Finance Minister	59	Tanaka
Yoshiro Mori	Education Minister	46	Fukuda
Kozo Watanabe	Health and Welfare Minister	51	Tanaka
Shinjiro Yamamura	Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Minister	50	Tanaka
Hikosaburo Okonogi	International Trade and Industry Minister	55	Nakasone
Kichizo Hosoda	Transportation Minister	71	Fukuda

Keiwa Okuda	Posts and Telecommunications Minister	56	Tanaka
Misoji Sakamoto	Labor Minister	60	Komoto
Kiyoshi Mizuno	Construction Minister	58	Suzuki
Seiichi Tagawa	Home Affairs Minister	65	NLC
Takao Fujinami	Chief Cabinet Secretary	51	Nakasone
Ichiro Nakanishi	Director General, Prime Minister's Office	68	Fukuda
Masaharu Gotoda+	Director General, Administrative Management Agency	69	Tanaka
Yuko Kurihara	Director General, Defense Agency	63	Suzuki
Toshio Komoto	Director General, Economic Planning Agency	72	Komoto
Michiyuki Isurugi	Director General, Science and Technology Agency	70	Suzuki
Minoru Ueda	Director General, Environmental Agency	69	Tanaka
Takashi Mogushi	Director, Cabinet Legislative Bureau	62	Ind.

*Retained from first Cabinet.
+Changed positions from first Cabinet.

* * *

LDP Party Positions

Rokusuke Tanaka	Secretary General	60	Suzuki
Shin Kanemaru	Chairman, Executive Council	69	Tanaka
Masayuki Fujio	Chairman, Policy Affairs and Research Council	66	Fukuda

Impact of Election on Japanese Domestic Politics, U.S.-Japan Relations

Prime Minister Nakasone's likelihood of surviving in office given the disastrous election results has been questioned by many observers in both Japan and the United States. While there can be no doubt that the elections damaged Mr. Nakasone, even a better showing would have left him with the same problems he now has in building his own power base within the LDP in time for the November 1984 party elections. However, his political vulnerability, which has always been a factor, was exposed by the December vote to a much greater degree than he might have expected.

The prime minister's essential political problem is his shallow power base and his continued dependence upon Kakuei Tanaka's faction for support. A favorable showing in December would have aided him in expanding his influence while putting some distance between himself and Tanaka. The LDP's poor showing has made his task more difficult and has added a sense of urgency to the moves he will make between now and November.

Assuming the continued solidarity of the Tanaka faction, Mr. Nakasone will have a better than average chance of being re-elected to the party presidency, which is tantamount to election as prime minister. The Tanaka

Japan's Real Gross National Product at Constant Prices (1975 Prices)

(in billions of yen, seasonally adjusted, quarterly totals and rates of growth at annual rates)

	FY 1981	FY 1982	October-December 1982	January-March 1983	April June 1983	July-September 1983
Gross National Product	Y198,068.2 (3.3%)	Y205,260.3 (3.3%)	Y206,040.4 (1.4%)	Y206,423.9 (0.7%)	Y208,683.0 (4.5%)	Y211,852.6 (6.2%)
Personal Consumption Spending	103,090.5 (1.1%)	108,092.5 (4.6%)	108,913.6 (6.1%)	109,712.5 (3.0%)	10,9915.3 (0.7%)	110,919.8 (3.7%)
Private Residential Construction	10,653.2 (-2.0%)	10,805.2 (1.3%)	11,370.6 (54.6%)	10,969.5 (-13.4%)	9,577.3 (-41.9%)	9,904.1 (14.4%)
Private Fixed Nonresidential Investment	34,130.3 (4.4%)	35,208.3 (2.8%)	35,290.9 (-0.8%)	35,070.6 (-0.6%)	35,400.2 (3.8%)	35,996.9 (6.9%)
Change in Business Inventories	1,416.7 (23.1%)	1,237.9 (-30.4%)	939.5 (*)	53.4 (*)	884.8 (*)	340.4 (*)
Government Current Expenditures	18,839.4 (3.9%)	19,347.3 (2.0%)	19,404.7 (2.4%)	19,502.5 (2.0%)	19,622.4 (2.5%)	19,828.2 (4.3%)
Government Fixed Investment	18,581.9 (2.9%)	18,470.2 (1.1%)	18,406.6 (-11.8%)	17,875.3 (-11.1%)	18,768.8 (21.6%)	18,932.2 (3.5%)
Change in Government Inventories	-272.3 (15.0%)	-371.2 (-136.3%)	-806.3 (*)	-291.3 (*)	-206.0 (*)	-165.6 (*)
Net External Sector	11,628.5 (38.6%)	12,470.2 (6.9%)	12,520.7 (10.4%)	13,531.5 (36.4%)	14,720.2 (40.0%)	16,096.6 (43.0%)
Exports of Goods and Services and Factor Income Received	40,001.2 (15.3%)	40,282.6 (0.7%)	40,060.5 (-8.5%)	39,891.5 (-1.7%)	41,108.1 (12.8%)	43,150.4 (21.4%)
Imports of Goods and Services and Factor Income Paid	28,372.7 (7.8%)	27,812.4 (-1.9%)	27,539.8 (-15.8%)	26,360.0 (-4.3%)	26,387.9 (0.4%)	27,053.8 (10.5%)

*Cannot be calculated or meaningless.

Source: Economic Planning Agency